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ABSTRACT

The development of an entry skills behavior package designed as lessons to prepare the culturally divergent children of the Southwestern United States for beginning reading instruction in existing school programs is described. The series of 135 discrete lessons teaches auditory discrimination, associative vocabulary, listening comprehension, sensory attributes, numerical concepts, and matching. A greater number of lessons in the associative vocabulary area are included, since evidence shows that deficits attributable to culturally deprived children typically cluster in this factor. Content material is selected to minimize cultural bias and to focus on the needs of the target population. The classroom management strategies, including toys and other extrinsic rewards, are an essential feature of the program. The program is designed so that goals are always attainable and very high scores are expected. Other factors contributing to high scores are a short time-period for the presentation of single concepts (30 to 90 seconds); the same format for all lessons; testing immediately after each presentation; explanations of possible rewards given to the children prior to the lessons; and the use of multiple-choice responses rather than forms requiring expressive language. (CM)

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MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

A Position Statement

by

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The Southwestern Cooperative Educational Laboratory, headquartered in Albuquerque but operating in New Mexico, Arizona, West Texas, and Oklahoma in the fulfillment of its research and development obligations to improve early educational opportunities for the culturally divergent children of the Southwest, i.e., Spanish-speaking, Indian and Black, has been involved in the exploration of, among other related areas, entry skills to reading and classroom management strategies.

SWCEL has long contended that good reading programs already exist, and that development of another reading program would only constitute duplication of effort--an undesirable practice anytime, but especially so considering the limited monies available to help resolve the many educational problems now confronting the Laboratory's target populations.

The Laboratory, rather than adding still another reading approach, has elected to invest its resources in one of the two related areas which have thwarted the expected learning rate. Because teachers are not familiar with the conventions needed to teach ITA, the phonetic approach, the language experience approach, etc., students often learn in spite of the teacher. If students do not possess the necessary entry skills prerequisite for specialized reading programs, the possibilities that a student will achieve are reduced greatly.

Because of the vast numbers of reading programs--often more than one type being used in a given classroom at the same time with the same children--the problem of evaluating them and developing concomitant technical skills is overwhelming.

In light of the foregoing, it would seem to follow naturally and logically, then, that a major focus of the Laboratory should be the development of an entry skill behaviors package integrating and utilizing results of earlier SWCEL research, i.e., performance can be heightened through implementation of tested reinforcement strategies relevant for culturally divergent children. Behaviorally, the criterion level desired and anticipated is that the target population subjects will perform at equivalent proficiency levels compared with middle-majority children using standardized reading readiness or entry skills to reading indices.

The entry skills package should incorporate evidence gained from earlier Laboratory studies regarding learning styles, motivational factors, and deficiencies related to reading entry skills. Through extrapolation from well-formulated laws of learning, SWCEL has tested hypotheses applying these principles to its target population. Concurrent with collection of data for the Laboratory's contingency management studies was an ongoing examination of pertinent entry skills behaviors. The Laboratory, then, had to answer the question of what content would be equally meaningful to children from all target populations. In other words, what skills were necessary for a child to negotiate a given reading program, and what information did the teacher need in regard to the children caught between two cultures, and how could he or she most effectively and efficiently elicit the desired behavior.

Currently, 135 discrete lessons are being tested in 38 classrooms throughout the Laboratory's four-state service area. This testing followed in-house assessment and performance measures obtained from

pilot classrooms in the Albuquerque public schools with analyses and observations of the representative classroom preceding the field implementation. In the field, teachers and students participating in the entry skills study simultaneously are involved in SWCEL's principal thrust Oral Language Program.

The entry skills package has now evolved from a convergence of highlights obtained from the OLP, and from a thorough evaluation of major reading readiness and entry skill behaviors as defined by reading authorities. The current package covers most major entry skills, but at least two are not included for the following reasons:

1. Primary Colors--SWCEL investigators feel the target population satisfactorily possesses these skills.
2. Motoric Elements--not amenable to group testing and recording at this time.

Content material is tailored to minimize cultural bias and relies to a considerable degree on a presentation familiar to the target population rather than on the typical predominantly Anglo-oriented content. Cultural awareness factors in the package have been highly influenced by input from teachers and supervisors. Early field testing indicates that initial selection of content items was appropriate as reflected by the absence of ethnic differences on criterion measures.

Classroom management strategies are an essential part of the package because they are used to obtain maximum student performance. Capitalizing on past Laboratory research, the content of the entry skills has been programmed, paced, and structured consistent with

SWCEL's findings about the educationally disadvantaged children of the Southwest. For example, field testing trends support the earlier correlated reinforcement (1968) findings that students who receive graduated criterion steps with extrinsic rewards perform significantly better ($p \geq .01$) than students who do not receive binary rewards. Reinforcement, then, is used as follows:

1. The individual child is extrinsically reinforced for acceptable group performance. Each child is given a toy if group standards are fulfilled.
2. The class as a whole is intrinsically reinforced for superior group performance. No items of goodies or other reinforcement gimmicks are provided to the class or to the individuals for superior group performance.
3. Goals are always attainable and the program phases these goals to be more difficult (although always within reach) as the lessons proceed.

The lessons show promise for assisting students in their attempt to negotiate the schools. Much remains to be done.

Early feedback indicates that students are performing at approximately the 90th percentile rank on the criterion measures. Further investigation is necessary to define additional prescriptive materials and approaches for those not meeting behavioral objectives.

Much needs to be done in developing stated behavioral objectives clearly defining for the teacher and for the students the object of individual and cumulative lessons. Greater emphasis must also be given

to assessing those affective dimensions that reflect variability in self-esteem and personal pride.

Finally, dissemination and installation strategies must be defined that will enable classroom teachers with a minimum of training to incorporate the classroom management strategies into their daily instructional programs.

DESCRIPTION OF LESSONS

Lessons developed for the study, "Classroom Management Strategies for Reading Readiness and Related Entry Skill Behaviors," are ready for field testing at the first grade level. They include auditory discrimination, listening and comprehension, associative vocabulary, sensory attributes, numerical concepts, and matching.

The concepts are presented singly, and each requires from 30 to 90 seconds, tailored to the short attention span of any first grade child. The total lesson time from onset to completion takes approximately six minutes.

The first 40 lessons in the field as the experimental task of the study on reinforcement strategies have yielded very high scores from all population groups. It is possible to suggest a number of contributing factors.

1. While decoding processes are fairly demanding (auditory, visual, sequential, discriminatory), the encoding requirement is only motoric ("make an 'X' on the correct response"). It seems the child is not handicapped by his inability to express himself, and is permitted to demonstrate his level of language comprehension and ability by choosing correctly from two or three choices.

2. The children are informed of the rewards they will receive if the criterion level is reached prior to the lesson presentation; thus, their attention and motivation levels are quite high.

3. In each lesson only one discrete concept is presented in a short period of time (30 to 90 seconds). Thus, the child is given a minimum of information to absorb within the range of his attention span.

4. The children are tested immediately following presentation of new material. This not only yields high scores, but provides them with an opportunity to employ their new knowledge, thus promoting retention level.

5. The same format is used for all lessons; thus the children are permitted to focus on content only, because they are familiar with the method of presentation and worksheets.

6. The lessons were designed to be given at the outset of the first grade. This experiment did not begin until the children had been in school for more than a month, and perhaps some material already had been covered.

Selection of the content areas for the dependent task was guided by efforts to parallel general content areas prevalent on standard entry skills and readiness instruments for first graders.

A greater representation (in terms of actual number of lessons) occurs in the area of associative vocabulary ("demonstrating awareness of the connotation of a word by associating it with certain intrinsic qualities of the underlying verbal concept"), since evidence suggests that "many of the specific deficits frequently attributed to culturally deprived children cluster in this factor." (Caldwell,

Daily diagnostic tests, standardized entry skills and reading readiness indices, e.g., Lee-Clark, Caldwell, in addition to a series of retention tests, will be utilized to demonstrate changes in entry skills and reading readiness behaviors associated with the application of established reinforcement strategies.

DEPENDENT TASK BREAKDOWN

1. Aural (auditory) discrimination
2. Listening and comprehension
3. Associative vocabulary *

- a. kinesics
- b. plants
- c. body parts
- d. transportation
- e. age
- f. school materials
- g. tools
- h. farm animals
- i. clothing
- j. fruit
- k. vegetables

* Deficits attributable to culturally deprived children cluster in this factor.

4. Sensory attributes
 - a. motion
 - b. spatial conception (e.g., length, height, proximity, depth, etc.)
 - c. labeling quantities
 - d. judgments of more or less and most and least
5. Numerical concepts
 - a. sets
 - b. sequential patterning
 - c. ordinal concepts